

What is rubella?

Rubella, also called German measles, is a contagious disease that usually causes a red rash that spreads over most of the body. While rubella is generally a mild illness, if it infects pregnant woman, particularly early during pregnancy, it can result in congenital rubella syndrome and cause serious birth defects.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

In children, rash is usually the first symptom. In older children and adults, there is often a period of low-grade fever, swollen glands, cold-like symptoms, and tender joints before the rash appears.

How is rubella spread?

The germs that cause rubella live in the nose, mouth, and throat, and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or talks. Other people nearby can then inhale the germs. The first symptoms may appear within 14 days after a person is exposed.

Who gets rubella?

Rubella is most common among preschool age children, but anyone can get it. Rubella can be hard to diagnose because some people do not have all of the symptoms. Vaccinated persons are almost always protected.

Is rubella dangerous?

Rubella is generally a mild disease but it is very dangerous to unborn babies if a woman is pregnant. Up to half of the women who catch rubella when they are pregnant will lose their babies or have babies born with heart disease, blindness, and deafness or have problems with learning.

How is rubella diagnosed?

A doctor may think a patient has rubella because of the symptoms, but a blood test is the only way to be sure that a person has rubella. A laboratory then tests the blood sample to determine whether the patient has rubella.

Can rubella be prevented?

Yes, there is a vaccine to prevent rubella. It is given along with measles and mumps vaccines in a single shot called MMR. Two doses of vaccine, given in a series usually starting at 12 months of age, are needed to protect a child from rubella. The vaccine is usually not recommended for children younger than 12 months old.

Is rubella vaccine safe?

Yes, it is safe for most people, but as with any medicine, there can be small risks that could occur after taking the vaccine. Most people who have problems with the vaccine may see soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given. Rarely, a person may have a rash, fever, swelling of the gland in the cheeks, neck or under the jaw, or have a seizure (caused by fever).

Where can you get more information?

The Iowa Department of Public Health, Immunization Program (800) 831-6293.